edexcel

Examiners' Report

Summer 2013

GCE Music Technology
Portfolio 1: 6MT01

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications come from Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

Summer 2013
Publications Code US036493
All the material in this publication is copyright
© Pearson Education Ltd 2013

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://www.edexcel.com/iwant to/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx

General Introduction

The overall impression is that the broad pattern of submissions witnessed over the last few years continues to be maintained. Once again, the quality of multi-track recordings is the strongest of the 3 practical tasks, whilst the arrangements are weaker.

The logs show that centres are continuing to make appropriate equipment choices (a trend that has been witnessed over the last few years). This is giving candidates an excellent chance of successful coursework completion.

However, there were still a high number of submissions with cut beginnings or endings of tracks and a significant number of submissions where tracks listed in the log appear to have been muted in the mix. It is essential that candidates take the time to listen to their mixdowns before final submission.

Sequenced Realised Performance

As has been the case in previous years, candidates are tending to approach this task in one of three ways; those who enter data incorrectly, those who enter it accurately but with a mechanical result, and those who produce a musical performance with editing, shaping and attention to detail.

The vast majority of candidates were able to successfully reproduce the pitch and rhythm aspects of the task to a reasonably successful standard. However, there continues to be a need for greater subtlety in the shaping of the MIDI data. Most submissions fell within the 21-25 (competent) mark descriptor (as was the case last year).
There were less candidates who appeared to be working solely from the given skeleton score than in previous years. Most candidates managed to copy/paste at least some of the given pitch/rhythm material at appropriate moments in the piece. Some candidates struggled to accurately input pitch/rhythm data, leading to performances that were unmusical.
A small minority of candidates recorded a vocalist singing the vocal part. This had a very significant impact on their mark as it is a specification infringement and the live audio cannot be credited.

Pitch and rhythm

The pitch/rhythm data entry was reasonably accurate. Most candidates successfully inputted the given skeleton score. A significant amount of looping and copy/paste was needed to produce

a successful realisation of *The Model* and the overwhelming majority of candidates made at least some attempt to go beyond the skeleton score. The additional synth solo, synth octaves and the presence/absence of the pad proved challenging for some candidates. As in previous years, in many instances, pitch errors were due to omissions of repeats rather than inaccurately entered data. These omissions often had a knock on effect on the success of the balance and dynamics.

The added synth melody from Bar 73 onwards was an important moment in the piece and some candidates did not attempt this or inputted it inaccurately.

Common errors included:

- placing parts (e.g. vocal, synth 3, synth 4 and bass) in the wrong octave (such errors appeared to be mainly caused by candidate error when choosing timbres)
- Pad not playing at correct points (particularly in verses 2 and 3)
- Vocal upbeats being missed
- Synth 3 upbeats being left in when looping
- Copy/pasting/looping individual errors
- Copy/pasting vocal rhythm from verse 1 to verses 2 and 3
- Incorrect inputting of the Synth 4 solo from Bar 73 onwards
- Omitting the notated 3 quaver drum fills
- Mis-aligning parts (this was particularly seen where parts were looped)

Timbre

Many examiners again noted the continued trend towards more successful timbre choice and editing. Many candidates had made some attempt to alter the envelopes of the sounds. However, there are still a number of candidates who rely too heavily upon presets, whilst some of the editing undertaken was not entirely successful, with a consequent impact on the success of the mix. The vocal timbre was generally well selected with less candidates choosing non-sustaining timbres (e.g. piano). In many sequences the sound chosen for synth 3 did not contrast enough with the vocal timbre and so was masked.

The improvements in the quality of responses to question 2 in the logbook were maintained this year and provided a very helpful resource to examiners when assessing the extent to which a candidate has worked with the timbres.

Balance / Pan

As in previous years, candidates who omitted timbres, for example, by missing out a part, failed to access the full marks for this criterion. Many examiners commented on the fact that balance remains an issue in a large proportion of submissions. Specifically, the relative levels of the lead vocal, synth 3 and the pad proved challenging to candidates this year.

The vast majority of candidates approached panning in an appropriate manner. However, there were a number of submissions with extreme panning (e.g. lead vocal/synth 3 panned hard left/right).

Musicality

Some candidates did attempt to shape the given dynamic shift in the synth 3 part (between *mf* and *f*). However, in a large number of submissions there was no dynamic shift at this point and this prevented many candidates from achieving top marks in this category. The other main dynamic shifts were closely linked to whether the presence/absence of parts had been accurately identified. Higher scoring candidates recognised and effectively shaped the dynamic shifts at key points.

Many candidates made at least some attempt at the detached articulation/phrasing of the synth and bass parts and some candidates attempted to shape the velocities of the vocal. However, the majority scored 'inconsistent' as there was insufficient attention given to shaping the vocal part through subtle use of pitch bends and modulation. Such details are crucial in successfully realising the vocal part.

Style / Music technology skills

As in previous years, a significant number of candidates seemed to struggle to create a consistent overall sense of style. Errors in timbral editing and lack of attention to dynamics, articulation and phrasing highlighted above continue to be the main causes of inconsistency.

The success in handling the end of the sequence was varied. The majority of candidates inputted the given fade, but some fades were inconsistently handled or not attempted at all.

The final masters continue to be of a good or excellent standard. However, there is still a large number of candidates who chop either the start or the end of the track (in all 3 tasks); a careless error that

is easily avoided. However, less candidates had long lead outs (more than 5 seconds) this year than previously heard.

Candidates are again reminded to study the mark scheme for this part of the task, as there is a reference to chopped beginnings and endings, often ignored. Work should always be checked to ensure that the lead-in and lead-out is not excessive (no more than 5 seconds) and that details such as a reverb tail or the decay of a synth pad are not cut off.

Multi-track Recording

As in the past, this tended to be the best done of the three tasks. However, many candidates still do not consider the potential practical challenges that can be invoked or avoided by their particular choice of stimulus. Generally, the more successful submissions had clearly selected a piece and arrangement suited to the given recording environment, resources and musicians. In these instances, candidates usually had less corrective work to achieve at the processing stage.

Many candidates are still choosing pieces that are beyond the demands of the specification (both in terms of track count and complexity). Whilst there are examples of outstanding work in these cases, more often than not such material proves to be beyond the level of skill demonstrated by most AS Level candidates.
On the other hand, there continue to be some examples again this year of candidates adopting questionable means with which to meet the task requirements in terms of track and microphone count. Such an approach does not benefit the candidate as, at best, it does not give sufficient scope for candidates to demonstrate their skill level and, at worst, it can lead to a loss of marks. Centres should again note that the following actions will almost certainly lead to a loss of marks:

- recording tracks with an inappropriate number of microphones (e.g. two mics on a bass amp)
- recording only the drum track and bass part of the song whilst still meeting the required number of mics/tracks (thus submitting a song that is regarded as ‘incomplete’ according to the mark scheme)
- using the studio software to copy a previously recorded track onto a second track. This does not count as an extra track.

The most successful centres continue to be those that keep things fairly simple; vocals, guitars, percussion, DI keyboards are typical examples of instruments that are largely well recorded.

Capture
As in previous years, this was generally the most successfully achieved aspect of the recordings. The majority of submissions demonstrated that candidates had selected appropriate microphones and positioned them competently. Most centres now seem very aware of the requirements of this task across the mark scheme and, whilst lots of centres do not have access to purpose built recording studios, the use of screens and acoustic panelling is making a very significant difference in many cases. Many candidates still struggle to achieve a consistently detailed focus across all parts, whilst room ambience continues to be an issue in some recordings. Correct positioning of microphones is crucial to overcoming such problems.

This year, an even greater number of recordings demonstrated effective noise elimination. However, background noise could clearly be heard on some recordings (mainly at the start and end of the track). Such noise needs to be edited out (where possible) and a re-recording made where not.

Processing
This criterion continues to be the section which differentiates a lot of submissions. Many candidates did not gain credit due to lack of attention or inconsistent application of effects and processes. The most successful candidates were usually those who had selected appropriate material and scored highly in criterion 1. In these instances, candidates usually had less corrective work to achieve at the processing stage.

In terms of EQ, as in previous years, common issues ranged from muddy mixes and booming bass guitars to very harsh electric guitars and dull drum tracks. In many cases it was clear that no EQ had been used when the track would have clearly benefitted from some.

Dynamic processing was reasonably well handled (although the choice of song again played a crucial role here). Many candidates struggled to get the lead vocal to “sit” in the mix, whilst kick drums and bass guitars were often lacking in sufficient control. A significant number of tracks had been overcompressed with “pumping” an issue - it appears that many candidates had been seeking to master their tracks as loud as possible and had overdone it. Gating was used by some candidates and this tended to be used reasonably effectively with some exceptions.

FX were reasonably well handled. Most mixes showed some attempt to use reverb although its application was often inconsistent. Instruments occupying very different spaces was a common observation made by examiners. Delay is also being increasingly well

utilised and there were examples of very effective guitar FX. There were less candidates choosing to use no reverb at all in a misguided attempt to create a “dry” contemporary mix.

Balance and blend

Many candidates attained an appropriate sense of balance (particularly if the stimulus material chosen was appropriate). However, it was still common for particular instruments to be over-favoured in the mix (often electric guitars, vocal or drums). The blending of instruments was more varied with many candidates struggling to fully achieve this aspect. In particular, candidates offering submissions containing a large number of DI’d instruments often failed to successfully blend these with the tracks captured via microphones.

In terms of stereo, most candidates attempted to establish an effective stereo field (although there were a similar number of mono submissions as heard last year). Many candidates panned the drum overheads (sometimes to an extreme), but greater care needs to be taken over panning other elements of the mix. Many mixes “pulled” to one side due to inconsistencies in this area. Fundamental misjudgements in panning (such as extreme positioning of bass guitar or drum kit elements) are becoming less common.

Creative Sequenced Arrangement

This year, overwhelmingly the most popular song was “Rolling in the Deep” (80-85%). The most popular style was dubstep, but there were a very significant number of disco arrangements as well.

There were examples of outstanding work across both styles with high scoring candidates demonstrating a secure and idiomatic understanding of their chosen style. There were a number of arrangements that showed extensive and convincing development of “Rolling in the Deep”. There were fewer examples of outstanding arrangements of “California Girls”.

However, as in previous years most candidates still take a relatively piecemeal and formulaic approach to developing the musical content of their sequence often relying on a few stock inventions across some of the criteria from which to construct their arrangement.

Use of stimulus
Many submissions successfully incorporated the stimulus material in their arrangements and there were very few pieces where the stimulus was unrecognisable. However, many candidates did not significantly develop the stimulus material. Too many candidates simply repeated the given melody and chord sequence. In dubstep arrangements some candidates simply inputted the stimulus melody and chords with an added "wub", whilst some candidates produced disco arrangements which had the given melody over a repetitive disco beat. The higher scoring candidates demonstrated extensive and convincing development in all aspects. In the best examples, fragmentation was utilised across a number of parts with significant detail in the layering and weaving together of motifs.

Style/Coherence
Most candidates captured the basic essence of their chosen style although a few submissions did not. Many candidates captured the style of the genre, but failed to create a sense of coherence/flow between sections. There was too much repetition in a significant number of submissions. As in previous years, the more successful candidates had usually approached and achieved the objectives of development of stimulus and style/coherence simultaneously, to achieve more fluid and convincing results in both respects.

Use of Music Technology
Confidence and control with use of music technology continues to be increasing, with many students demonstrating a clear understanding of the technical requirements of the two styles.

In dubstep arrangements, candidates created the characteristic "wub" sound with varying degrees of success. The most successful candidates produced "wubs" that made a very successful contribution to the overall texture of the piece. However, other candidates struggled to control the different parameters appropriately and many submissions involved a basic synth-based sound with an added formulaic "wub" sound underneath. Many students captured the characteristic bass-heavy sound, but some candidates' submissions lacked power in the bottom end, particularly at the "drop". Many candidates recorded short samples and then manipulated them to varying degrees of success. The most successful submissions showed an ability to bring all of these technical elements together into a coherent whole.

There were a number of dubstep submissions which contained samples of Adele singing (either the radio or acoustic versions). This is clearly a specification infringement due to copyright and such

samples were not credited when marking the work. In addition, some other candidates used continuous audio tracks (again, a specification infringement). This continuous audio content was not credited. Such specification infringements had a significant impact on the candidates' marks.

In disco submissions, the timbres were usually reasonably well selected and some dynamic contrast was present although the balance was sometimes poorly handled. The use of articulation and phrasing was inconsistent with many candidates shaping the bass riffs and horn stabs effectively, but not giving enough attention to the lead timbre. The stereo field was explored in a large number of submissions, but often lacking in others.

As in previous years, in both genres a significant number of candidates appeared not to have checked their final recordings for obvious errors, such as cuts/lead outs, which could have been easily rectified.

Melody

As in previous years, the extent to which melody was developed and added to varied considerably. Many candidates created effective bass riffs which provided a solid foundation for their pieces. In addition, the use of countermelodies was effective in some arrangements. However, many candidates did not develop the original stimulus melody and, where attempted, the results were often formulaic and/or inconsistent. The higher scoring candidates developed the given melodic material extensively, adding their own melodic ideas and countermelodies which blended seamlessly with the original material. In dubstep, the original melody was often developed effectively using fragmentation, whilst in disco the creation of instrumental solos were often worthy of considerable credit.

Harmony

The development of harmony was an area in which a very significant number of candidates did not score higher then "3". Many candidates simply completed the given chords without any successful development/new additions. Others changed the chords to ones which did not fit with the melody, leading to uncomfortable passages. In dubstep there were a number of submissions where the bassline had been altered with some successful resulting implications. In disco, some candidates successfully introduced a key change in the last chorus which was often very effective, if a little formulaic. Candidates need to think carefully about how they can extend the given harmonic material.

Rhythm

This aspect continues to be an area where a number of candidates scored well. Many candidates utilised the “wub” well in dubstep to create complex rhythms, whilst in the disco genre candidates managed to successfully integrate syncopated basslines and brass stabs. However, other candidates produced arrangements where the rhythms were overly repetitive, often relying on a few drum loops. Higher scoring candidates showed considerable rhythmic development in their work as loops were edited and new rhythmic motifs added as the piece progressed. In disco, higher scoring candidates also made creative use of stops, different drum patterns and rhythmically complex instrumental solos.

Texture and Instrumentation

There was some good work from many candidates in both genres to produce appropriate textures. However, most candidates’ submissions did not fully develop the texture to reach the top mark box. There was too much repetition in many arrangements. Higher scoring candidates created idiomatic textures that maintained interest throughout the piece.

Form / structure

Most submissions were at least functional in this aspect with some sense of direction. A significant number of submissions simply followed the stimulus, whilst others were excessively repetitive. Higher scoring candidates produced appropriate, but creative structures that built on, but also extended the structure of their chosen stimulus. Candidates need to think about how to bring appropriate structural variety to their arrangements, creating contrast between the different sections.

Logbooks

The logbook

Many examiners commented on continued improvement in this aspect of the unit (particularly in Questions 9 and 10). However, the logbooks do continue to vary in quality considerably. Some submissions included photographs of mic set-ups and screen shots, whilst others gave very little information and contained several blank pages. Where included, photographs of mic positioning proved to be very helpful as they gave an accurate demonstration of the mic setup used.

Candidates need to be reminded of the fact that, whilst questions 9 and 10 are the only responses given a mark, the other questions in the log should be approached with care and attention. They are a

vital source of information for the examiner who refers to them when marking. If features are not clearly identified they may not receive the full credit they deserve.

In particular, as pointed out in previous years, reference should be made to any editing of the timbres in Task 1A and Task 1C. It is also important to explain clearly the mics used and the tracks to which they relate in Task 1B.

Settings of processors should be included in the track sheets.

Many examiners commented on an overall improvement in the answers to questions 9 and 10, although the quality of responses remains very varied. Some candidates are missing out on further credit here. Centres are reminded that it is worth 20 marks and that the answers can be thoroughly prepared before writing up. Many candidates' submissions failed to score highly in this aspect and it can have a very significant effect on their overall result for Unit 1.

Question 9

This question requires the candidate to explain how the arrangement was developed from the stimulus.
There is still a tendency for too many candidates to focus on the development of their style, rather than the stimulus, which inevitably impacts the credit that can be awarded. Many candidates did not refer to the stimulus in any detail in their answers. The more successful responses usually provided specific detail (bar/time references, chord/note names, section descriptions) and demonstrated correct use of musical or technical terminology, to indicate clearly their intentions and rationale when developing the stimulus.

Question 10

This question requires the candidate to correctly identify the stylistic features of the chosen style *and* explain how these are used in the arrangement.

Most students appeared to have conducted some research around their chosen genre, but many still relied on a simplistic or generalised understanding of a few stylistic rudiments. Common shortcomings involved vague generalisations (such as descriptions of disco as being 'catchy'). Candidates need to focus on being as specific as possible when commenting on how they have included key features in their arrangement. It is not sufficient to write “dubstep uses a wub so I have used a wub”. Detail is required for full credit including reasons

for choice, details of technology used and examples of dubstep artists and songs that use similar techniques.

Higher scoring responses demonstrated breadth of listening with reference to specific tracks/artists. They showed a more sophisticated appreciation of the specific subtleties of the genre, linking this understanding clearly to specific features of their own arrangement (often using time or bar references, where useful).

Administration

The overwhelming majority of centres submitted work on time and complete.

A few centres failed to pack the CDs adequately so that they arrived broken, but the number of cases was less than in previous years. In other cases work had not been thoroughly checked before sending to the examiner. A few CDs were blank or contained only data, whilst there were also a few instances of recordings in which the original was audible in the candidate's submission. The most likely explanation for this is that it was used as a guide track and not erased before the final mix. In such cases, it is vital that centres respond to requests for replacement work from examiners promptly. Whilst it is understood by the examining team that CD errors do occur, all CD's should be checked for playback in a standard CD player (not computer CD drive).

If candidates are wanting to submit additional sheets in their logbook these should be clearly labelled with candidate name, number and centre name/number, put in the booklet in the right place and secured with a treasury tag/staples.

It is important for centres to retain back-up material. Centres should refer to the *Administrative Support Guide* (formerly *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations* document) that is available on the GCE Music Technology website under *Assessment Materials/ Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations*.

Pearson Education Limited. Registered company number 872828
with its registered office at Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, Essex CM20 2JE